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Esther 2

"The Misery of our Glory"

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Unlike other characters in the story of Esther, Esther herself is someone who demonstrated quiet obedience to the Lord without a desire to grab the glory. Even though she is promoted to the most influential role as queen of Persia, she never seeks the power, position, or prestige. God providentially promoted her and used her for his glory and for the saving of the Jewish people. When we seek our own glory, we end up with misery. That's because all glory belongs to the Lord (Psalm 115:1). In today's study as Pastor Gary teaches about the crowning of Esther and the misery of our glory.

Historical Background

1. Herodotus, an ancient historian, wrote that King Xerxes, as a result of being rebuffed by Queen Vashti, became enraged and went to war with the Greeks.
 - a. Xerxes took 2 million men and 4,000 ships to the Greek islands.
 - b. The result of the Battle of Salamis in 480BC was a decisive victory for the Greeks.
 - c. Xerxes regrouped after having spent about one year in Thessaly.
 - d. He launched another attack on the Greeks, and the final land battle was the Battle of Plataea in 479BC, which was another crushing loss.
 - e. The approximate time-gap between Esther chapters 1 and 2 is two to three years.
 - f. When Xerxes returned to Persia, he was a weak, broken, sullen, and defeated man.

2. Pastor Gary said of Xerxes: "When his pride and his ego [were] wounded, he dishonored the woman he loved, and then he got angry and restless. [Then] he engaged in an adventure, [which] in this case was his military adventure to try to bolster his pride and ego around the world, because [they] had been

wounded earlier. [The result of his adventures were] greater humiliation and defeat. I've met a thousand Xerxes in my life. The truth of the matter is that there is a little bit of Xerxes in every single man. [When] you get your pride stepped on and your ego wounded, [if] you don't confess pride as sin, and if you don't get your ego, that is your identity, grounded in Christ, let me tell you what often happens. You end of dishonoring a woman in your life, you end up getting angry and resentful, you end up seeking immoral adventures to try to bolster your pride and ego again. Only in the end, to suffer greater defeat and humiliation. [This] is the pathway of Xerxes."

3. There is a hint in [Esther 2](#) that Xerxes may have regretted the drunken, rash decision he made concerning deposing Queen Vashti.
 - a. In the two or three years since this incident, during which time he has lost two major military defeats, his wife is gone, if not dead, and the whole world is aware!
4. Mordecai is not mentioned in the Bible outside of the book of Esther.
 - a. He was from the tribe of Benjamin.
 - b. Mordecai was Esther's cousin, who raised her like a daughter after her parents died.

The Providence Of The Lord

5. The Lord has two hands, so to speak.
 - a. One works in visible and tangible ways, which we call miracles.
 - b. The other works in unseen, invisible things behind the scenes, and we call this providence.
 - c. His providence is not less powerful than his miracles; it's just that we are more often drawn to the miraculous displays of the Lord.
 - d. We need to remember that the Lord is always working in amazing ways behind the scenes, as he orchestrates events, and weaves the tapestry of our lives.
6. The book of Esther is about the providence of the Lord.
7. He is so "unseen" in this book that he is not mentioned by name, title, or even by inference!
8. Even though the Lord is not revealed visibly, he is evident throughout the book.
9. The Lord knew all about Haman's evil plot to annihilate the Jews, so he arranged people and situations in such a way that he moved Esther into a strategic role

as the new queen of Persia.

Esther

10. Esther's given name was Hadassah, which in Hebrew means, myrtle.
 - a. Esther is her Babylonian name, which comes from the goddess of fertility, Ishtar.
11. Esther's family was counted among other Jewish families that did not return with the first wave of exiles who returned to Jerusalem.
12. [Esther 2:12](#) - *"Before a girl's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics."*
 - a. Pastor Gary said women in the United States spend 26.7 billion dollars each year on cosmetics and perfumes!
13. Esther won the "Miss Persia" competition!
 - a. [Esther 2:17](#) - *"Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti."*
 - b. It is estimated that Esther was about 18 to 20 years old, and Xerxes was about 35 years old.
14. Pastor Gary said this account is essentially about sex trafficking versus a beauty contest.
 - a. These were virgin teenage girls who were "recruited" for sex by the most powerful man on earth.
 - i. [Esther 2:13-14](#) - *"And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaasshgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name."*

Mordecai And Esther

15. Mordecai was a complex man.
 - a. We are left to wonder where Mordecai was when all of this was going on, because he seems have done nothing to save his adopted daughter from

sexual abuse, even though we read that he made an effort to find out about her welfare on a daily basis.

- i. **Esther 2:11** - *“Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.”*

16. Esther was a complicated person, too!

- a. Pastor Gary said Bible scholars are divided when it comes to understanding who the real Esther really was.
- b. It’s true that in the end Esther was a brave, courageous young woman that God used in a remarkable and providential way, but early in the account there is confusion about her relationship with the Lord.
 - i. The Bible doesn’t record a single reference to Esther praying.
 - ii. The Bible doesn’t record a single reference to Esther knowing or quoting Scripture.
 - iii. The Bible tells us that she accepted the king’s food, which was a direct violation of the dietary laws of the Jews.
 1. **Esther 2:9b** - *“Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food.”*
 - iv. The Bible tells us that she didn’t want anyone to know that she was a Jew.
 1. **Esther 2:10** - *“Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.”*
- c. If these things were said about anyone of us, any reasonable person would conclude that we didn’t have a relationship with the Lord.

17. The account of Daniel, who lived one generation ahead of Esther, stands in stark contrast to Esther.

- a. Daniel was also a teenager who was recruited to serve in the palace.
- b. Daniel prayed in defiance of the king’s order.
- c. Daniel refused the king’s food.
- d. Daniel quoted Scripture.
- e. Daniel was completely open about the fact that he was a Jew.

18. Pastor Gary said of Esther: “I personally believe that she [was] a godly young woman whose faith was quiet, but nonetheless real. Whose personality [was] reserved. We see that at times she came across [as being] timid, but nonetheless genuine. [She was someone] who was trying to please both the king... and her older cousin, Mordecai, who was like a father to her. She [was] not complicit in the whole sex thing with Xerxes in the process of her selection. [This] was not consensual, because the king was an older man and the most

powerful man on the planet, who stole her innocence in a contest to deflower young teenage girls... At times she appears lonely and scared... and at other times she appears [to be] brave and courageous. But in the end, God [used] her to accomplish a great purpose – the saving of the Jewish people.”

19. The thing that stands out about Esther more than anything else is the way that she just wanted to be available to be used by the Lord.

Pursuing Glory Leads To Misery

20. It is noteworthy that Esther never tried to grab the glory by vying to get the queen’s crown or the promotion or the prestige.

21. When you pursue glory, you end up with misery.

22. When you contrast the life of Esther with the lives of others in the Bible, you will see how true this is.

a. Xerxes

- i. **Esther 1:4** – *“For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.”*
- ii. For six months his desire was to display his palace, his possessions, his prestige, and his power.
- iii. According to Herodotus, a few years after these events, a captain in his personal bodyguard, with the assistance of his chief eunuch, assassinated Xerxes,

b. Haman

- i. Haman’s primary goal was to do whatever it took to make sure people knew about his power, his prestige, his position, and his honor.
- ii. In an ironic twist, when Haman’s plot to exterminate the Jews was uncovered, he was hung on the gallows he had built for Mordecai

c. Korah

- i. **Numbers 16** tells the story of Korah’s efforts to usurp Moses authority and leadership.
- ii. Korah and his followers ended up being killed by the Lord.

d. Saul

- i. **1 Samuel 15** tells the story of King Saul, who assumed the duties of a priest.
- ii. The kingdom was taken from Saul and given to David, because David was a man after God’s own heart.

e. Uzziah

- i. **2 Chronicles 26** tells the story of King Uzziah also assumed the

- duties of a priest.
 - ii. Uzziah was stricken with leprosy and lived the rest of his life in isolation.
 - f. King Herod Agrippa I
 - i. [Acts 12](#) tells the story of how Herod Agrippa took the glory for himself, and the Lord struck him dead.
23. Esther was given power, prestige, and position, because she was willing to put God on display and give him the glory.
24. [Psalm 115:1](#) - *“Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Esther 2:1-14](#) and [Esther 3:1-6](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Share examples of times when you've seen the visible hand of God at work in your life.
4. Share examples of times when you've seen how the Lord was working providentially behind the scenes to accomplish his purposes in your life.
5. How has the Lord strategically placed you in your neighborhood, job, etc.?
6. Spend time talking about how Mordecai and Esther are very complex people. (See #15, #16, and #18 above)
7. Compare and contrast Mordecai and Esther with Daniel. (See #17 above)
8. Are you like Esther in that one of the greatest desires of your life is to be used by the Lord?
9. Spend time talking about men who involved themselves in the pursuit of glory. (See #22 above)
10. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).